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ABSTRACT

A great deal can be taught using the newspaper because this medium contains a variety of information in a number of differing formats. Straight news and sports stories can be used to teach or reinforce the skills of attending to detail, comparing and contrasting, categorizing, determining the main idea, understanding vocabulary, sequencing, establishing a purpose for reading, cause and effect, drawing conclusions/predicting outcomes, critical reading, and dictionary skills. The editorials are well suited to teach and reinforce the skill of distinguishing between fact and opinion. Skills which can be taught or reinforced through the use of the editorial cartoons include: making inferences, drawing conclusions, understanding symbols, summarizing, and critical thinking. The classified ads, comics, and the index can also be used to teach and reinforce basic reading skills. The ability to read and interpret the visual displays presented in newspapers is important if students are to become independent learners and thinkers. The key to using the newspaper to enhance instruction lies in teachers' abilities to be creative and in their abilities to see a match between the objective to be taught and the type of article which best fits the intended objective. (MG)

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Incorporating the Newspaper into Basal Lessons

Paper presented at the Indiana University Fall Language Arts Festival
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by

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INCORPORATING THE NEWSPAPER INTO BASAL LESSONS

The newspaper is the most accessible medium of print throughout the world. It is also the most widely and consistently read piece of literature published. Besides providing its readers with what is happening at local, state, national and international levels, a great deal can be taught from the newspaper because it contains a variety of information in a number of differing formats. The purpose of this presentation is to present some of the most common formats, found in the newspaper, for conveying information and to provide suggestions as to how to incorporate the newspaper into the basal reading lesson without adding a lot of extra time and work for the classroom teachers. The suggestions presented in this paper can be incorporated into the basal lesson whether or not students are grouped for instruction. These suggestions can also be modified somewhat and placed in learning/activity centers so that students may work independently.

The Straight News Story

The purpose of a news story is to inform the reader of the facts. All good news stories have a headline, a lead, and a body. The headline is the summary of a story. It gives a quick idea of what the story is about. The lead gives the most important facts of what, where, when, why, who and how. The body gives further details - the most important details first and the least important ones last.

Straight News Stories can be incorporated into a basal lesson in a variety of ways. Timely news stories, or news stories that relate to a story in the textbook, can be used to create readiness and/or to motivate students. For example, creating readiness for reading a story about an explorer could be achieved by bringing to the class stories from the paper about modern-day explorers such as astronauts, mountain climbers, young pilots, etc. Students could also search the newspaper for similar articles. Creating readiness for a story about an athlete could be achieved by bringing to the class stories about current athletes or Olympians.

Straight news stories could also be used to teach and/or reinforce skills. Examples include:

Attending to Details: Since the 5 W's and H make up the lead, students could be given an activity which would require them to seek out the answers to the 6 questions: Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?

Comparing and Contrasting: Students could be given the same news story as reported in two different newspapers and asked to

look at the similarities of the story, as well as note the differences in the stories.

Categorizing: After an introduction as to the types of news stories (local, state, national, international) students could be asked to categorize according to the type of news story. After being taught the different types of stories which appear in a newspaper (news, editorial, feature, sports, etc.) students could also be asked to categorize according to these categories as well.

Determining the Main Idea: Since the main idea of the story is usually stated in the lead, the headlines could be cut off and students could be required to write their own headline. Along the same lines, teachers could clip the headlines from a group of stories and students could be required to match the headline to the appropriate story.

Understanding Vocabulary: Stories could be used to reinforce getting the meaning of a word by using context clues. Students may also be exposed to the abbreviations which are prevalent in the newspaper such as UP, API, etc. Other vocabulary skills which could be taught, reinforced or maintained include identifying propaganda, matching pronouns to their antecedents, determining meanings of affixes, and recognizing synonyms and antonyms.

Sequencing: A news story could be clipped from the newspaper and then clipped again by paragraphs. Students could then be asked to arrange the paragraphs from most important to least important. Students could be asked to retell a story in the order that events occurred.

Purpose for Reading: Students could read a headline and then turn the headline into a question. Then, they could read to find the answer to the question. Commonly taught in middle schools is SQ3R. Students could use the news story to practice this technique.

Cause and Effect: Students could analyze a news story and determine the problem, the cause, and the effects of the action. Through the analysis of cause/effect, students could also be assigned to predict further effects, based on what they have read.

Drawing Conclusions/Predicting Outcomes: Students could be given a news story and asked to draw some conclusions based on what they have read, or predict what will happen as a result of the event they have read about. Teachers may want the students to support their conclusions and/or predictions by identifying the lines from the article which helped them to form their conclusions/predictions.

Critical Reading: Students could be given two different accounts of the same event and asked to read each story to interpret bias, author's purpose, and to determine whether the account is a straight news story or whether the reporter has slanted the story in some way. Students could also be asked to mark those words which in some way slant or bias the news story.

Students could also be asked to determine the reliability of sources. For example, if no source is given, the reader should be wary of what is said. If "it is reported," "it is believed,"

or "it is understood" appear, the reader should take into account the reputation of the writer. "It is on good authority," "trustworthy sources say," and "it is reliably understood" indicate the information is accurate, but the reporter can not identify his source. Phrases like "official spokesman," and "people close to the source" are usually dependable, but do not guarantee accuracy. Official documents or announcements are more reliable. The document or announcement may be fact, but what is reported may not be. First-hand accounts are stories of what the reporter saw himself. They are dependable only if the reporter is dependable.

Dictionary Skills: Using the dictionary can also be reinforced through newspaper reading. If students can not figure out the meaning of a word through context clues, they can go to the dictionary to look up unknown words.

The Editorial

The editorial page exists for the purpose of presenting opinions. Usually editorials are intended to attack, defend, teach, or praise. There are a number of different types of editorials which include editorial cartoons, letters to the editor, syndicated columnists and editorials which are unsigned. The unsigned editorials are inferred to contain the thoughts of the newspaper editors as a group. The editorials and editorial cartoons are reflections on news in an essay and/or picture format.

Editorials

Generally, the structure of an editorial, letter to the editor or syndicated column includes a statement of the problem, evidence and/or facts to support the statement, opinions, and a solution. Skills which can be reinforced and maintained by using a straight news story can also be reinforced and maintained using editorials (with slight modifications). However, the editorials are more well-suited to teach, reinforce and maintain the skill of distinguishing between fact and opinion than any other section of the newspaper.

The simplest way to use the editorial is to have students determine which statements are statements of fact and which are statements of opinion. This could be done by highlighting statements of fact: by underlining facts in one color, opinions in another; by writing facts in one column, opinions in another: or by oral discussion. Students could also be asked to find key words which would alert them that this is the writer's opinion and not a fact. Another way to use editorials is to have students identify the author's purpose for writing and the author's point of view. Then, the students should be able to identify the supporting details. In other words, two questions could be asked to the students: "What is the author's point?" and "How does he support his opinion?"

Similarly, students could be asked to read an editorial. They could be asked whether they agree or disagree with the author and to state the reasons why they agree or disagree. Reasons could come from the editorial itself or from the students' background knowledge.

Editorial Cartoons

Editorial cartoons are visually appealing, utilizing critical thinking and interpretation skills. Several techniques used by cartoonists allow them to voice opinions in picture form. One of the most common techniques is the caricature. Personalities with prominent features are exaggerated to make the person instantly recognizable. Some common pictorial stereotypes include aged people, pictured as bent and toothless; scientists, bearded with glasses; and rich men, fat. Cartoonists also enlarge figures to make them seem enormous, threatening or serious. A small figure next to a larger one implies that the smaller one is vulnerable. Symbolism also plays a large role in editorial cartoons. Common symbols include the dove (peace), elephant (Republicans), donkey (Democrats), Uncle Sam (United States), hammer and sickle (Russia), ball and chain (burden), etc.

Skills which can be taught, reinforced and/or maintained through the use of the editorial cartoon include: making inferences, drawing conclusions, understanding symbols, summarizing, and critical thinking. Questions that teachers may want to ask include: "What is the artist saying?" "What symbols are used?" "What other techniques does the artist used to make her/his point?" "On which issue is the artist commenting?" The teacher may want to have the students summarize the illustration and then support her/his notion by listing the techniques and/or symbols and what they represent. Students may also be asked to find an editorial that reflects the cartoonist's opinion and one that opposes the cartoonist's point of view.

The Feature Story and Human Interest Story

The feature story and the human interest story are usually related to a news story, but are considered to contain less important aspects of the news story. Both features and human interest stories follow the same general format: an introductory paragraph begins the story, followed by paragraphs (with topic sentences), and ending with a concluding paragraph. As with the editorial, the feature and human interest stories can be used to teach, reinforce and maintain the skills (with minor modifications) listed under the straight news story.

One use of the feature or human interest story could be to motivate and create readiness for reading a given story. Since feature and human interest stories provide additional information about some person or event in the news, these articles would provide a more in-depth look from a different perspective. Reading features and human interest stories could allow students to practice summarizing. By selecting the important details and paraphrasing, students could be asked to write a summary of the story. They could also practice summarizing by retelling the article in their own words. Comparison/contrast skills could be practiced by having students locate the related news story and then compare/contrast the two stories. If the feature or human interest story was written in a chronological organizational pattern, then sequencing skills could be practiced.

The Sports Story

Sports stories are usually written in the inverted pyramid format and can be used to teach, reinforce and maintain the

skills discussed under the news story. These stories, particularly the headlines, are good for teaching and reinforcing synonyms and antonyms. Writers typically try to find different ways to say "win" and "lose" so as not to be repetitive. Abbreviations are also common among sports stories. Vocabulary development is another good use of the sports stories. Many of the sports have their own unique vocabulary such as golf (birdie, par, bogey, eagle).

Classified Ads

The classified ads section can also be used to teach, reinforce and maintain basic reading skills. Classified ads may be in the form of help wanted ads, articles for sale, housing ads, etc. The want ads may be useful for teaching, reinforcing, and maintaining the following skills: categorizing, comparing/contrasting, using an index, vocabulary development (abbreviations and symbols).

Additional practice with categorizing can be accomplished in several ways. First, a variety of ads could be cut from the paper and students could be asked to categorize the type of ad (help wanted, sales, housing, etc.). A further breakdown would include categorizing sales ads (pets in one category, furniture in another). Compare/contrast skills could be further developed by evaluating ads. For example, students could collect all the advertisements for nursing positions. They could compare/contrast these ads and select the job they would take. Reasons for this decision might also be included in a practice lesson of this type.

Usually each classified ads section has its own index. Students could be instructed to use the index to find specific advertisements in the classified section.

Because patrons pay for the advertisements, they use abbreviations to lower their cost. Therefore, students could be instructed to interpret what the different abbreviations mean and how they affect the advertisement. Students might also be instructed to use the advertisements to detect words which are used to encourage readers to buy a particular item.

Comics

The comics page which is placed in the newspaper as entertainment can be used to teach skills such as sequencing, predicting outcomes, context clues, and comparison/contrast. Students can be given a comic strip which has been cut into sections and then asked to put the sections into sequential order. Predicting outcomes may be reinforced by "whiting out" the last "bubble" and asking students to predict what was said or what happened next. The students' predictions can then be compared to the real ending. Another use of the comic strip is that of context clues. After "whiting out" some of the predictable words or letters of predictable words, students can be asked to fill in the blank with the word or letters. This is similar in format to a cloze test. The comics page can also be used to reinforce the notion of dialogue, complete with appropriate punctuation. All the "bubbles" can be "whited out" and students can be asked to fill in the "bubbles" using their own dialogue. Comic strips can also be used for reinforcing

comparison/contrast skills. Students can select two comic strips and compare/contrast such things as tone. mood, language, setting, purpose and characters.

Index

The newspaper index can be used to teach indexing skills suggested in the basal. However, most newspapers have an advantage over the basals. Usually two indices can be found in each newspaper: the main index and the classified ads index. Teachers can ask questions which required students to use the appropriate index or the teacher can make a game of the index. By providing students with a list of questions, students can "race" to see who finds all of the information (using the index) first.

Visual Displays

Visual displays such as maps. graphs, tables, charts and schedules appear more frequently in newspapers today than in years past. The ability to read and interpret these visual displays is important if students are to become independent learners and thinkers. Askov and Kamm (1982) have listed some skills which can be taught, reinforced and maintained through visual displays. These skills include comparing relative amounts, extracting directly, interpolating, determining differences, determining purpose, summarizing, making projections, relating information, and solving problems. Map skills include understanding the representation system, and using location and measurement skills. Comparing amounts involves a comparison of two or more amounts and deciding which one is greater, lesser. or the same. Extracting directly asks students to read the amount on a graph by observing the exact line to which a bar or dot is placed. Interpolating is similar to extracting directly except the student derives facts which are represented on graphic by bars or dots in between amounts. Determining differences involves comparing at least two different amounts that have been extracted directly or interpolated. The amounts may be compared by adding, subtracting, multiplying or dividing. Determining purpose involves looking at the title and other labels on the bottom and sides of the display. Summarizing entails noting all the entries and then identifying trends or main characteristics. Making projections requires the student to note all of the trends and then draw a conclusions about the information. Relating information involves utilizing background knowledge. Students make predictions and suggest implications from the display. Solving problems asks students to examine a display to determine the scope of information presented and then select parts of the information to solve a problem or satisfy an inquiry. With maps, representation refers to the use of symbols to designate objects on a map. Location refers to finding places on maps through the use of grids and directions. Measurement refers to determining distances using the representation system provided (taken from E. Askov and K. Kamm, Study Skills in the Content Areas, Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1982).

Teachers may turn these various categories into questions which fit the display being used. Students can then read from the display to answer questions. These skills are covered in the

basal reader, so like all of the other skills presented in this paper, they allow for teaching, reinforcing and maintaining skills related to reading visual displays.

Miscellaneous

Other types of articles appear throughout the newspapers. Some of these include recipes, advise columns, critiques, "how-to-do-it" articles, community events, puzzles, horoscopes, etc. Most of these articles lend themselves to the skill of following directions, while others help to increase vocabulary. More advanced students could be directed to columnists such as Erma Bombeck, Art Buchwald, etc. and asked to analyze the columns (satire, hyperbole, metaphor, simile, etc.).

Concluding Remarks

This paper is not intended to be an all-inclusive listing of the ways the newspaper can be incorporated into a basal lesson. Nor is it a complete listing of the uses of the newspaper. It is recommended that the newspaper be incorporated into all subject areas. For example, there are ways a newspaper can be used to stimulate writing activities such as critical reviews of movies, tv shows and plays. Students could also write their own news, feature and human interest stories as well as write their own editorials and draw their own editorial cartoons. The newspaper could be used in science classes by having students locate science stories and by interpreting weather maps and the appropriate symbols. Mathematics instruction could be enhanced through the newspaper, especially by using the sports section and stock market reports. Furthermore, the newspaper could also be used for social studies, health, physical education, home economics and industrial arts instruction. The key to using the newspaper to enhance instruction lies in teachers' abilities to be creative and in their abilities to see a match between the objective to be taught and the type of article which best fits the intended objective.

For further information:

Cheyney, A. (1971). Teaching Reading Skills Through the Newspaper. Newark: IRA.

Decker, H. (1972). Newspaper Workshop: Understanding Your Newspaper. New York: Globe.

Stein, W. (1977). Your Daily Paper. Syracuse: New Readers Press.

USA Today. (1985). Classline.

Most large daily newspapers also offer educational materials for use with their newspaper.